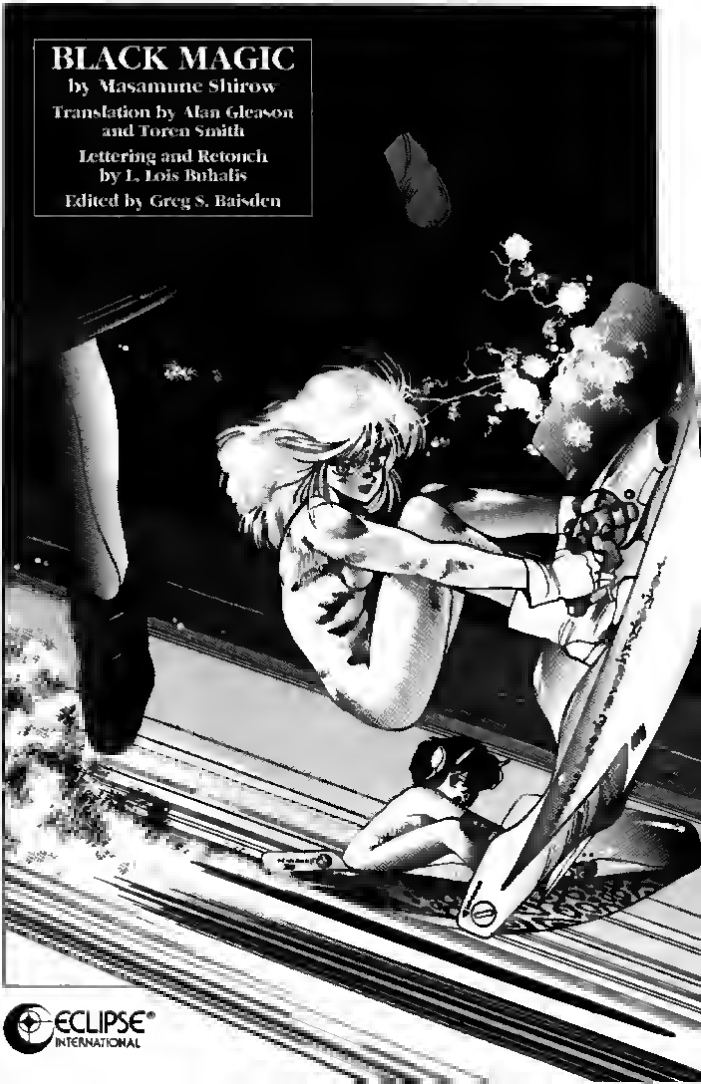
ECLIPSE INTERNATIONAL

Masamune Shirow's
seminal first work

BLACK Magic

Book One of Four

STUDIO PROTEUS


BLACK MAGIC
by Masamune Shirow
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INTERNATIONAL

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In this English edition of *Black Magic*, the artwork has been reversed
to read left-to-right for the American audience.

PROLOGUE

WHEN IT BEGAN, AND WHEN IT ENDED, IS SOMETHING KNOWN ONLY TO THOSE WHO WERE THERE.

WHAT IS KNOWN IS THAT THE HUMAN CIVILIZATION ON VENUS EVENTUALLY COMPLETED THE MAMMOTH SUPERCOMPUTER, NEMESIS.

THE NEMESIS SYSTEM WAS DESIGNED TO TAKE IN HAND ALL THE GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS OF THE VENUSIAN FEDERATION. ITS MISSION: BRING ABOUT UTOPIA.

NEMESIS

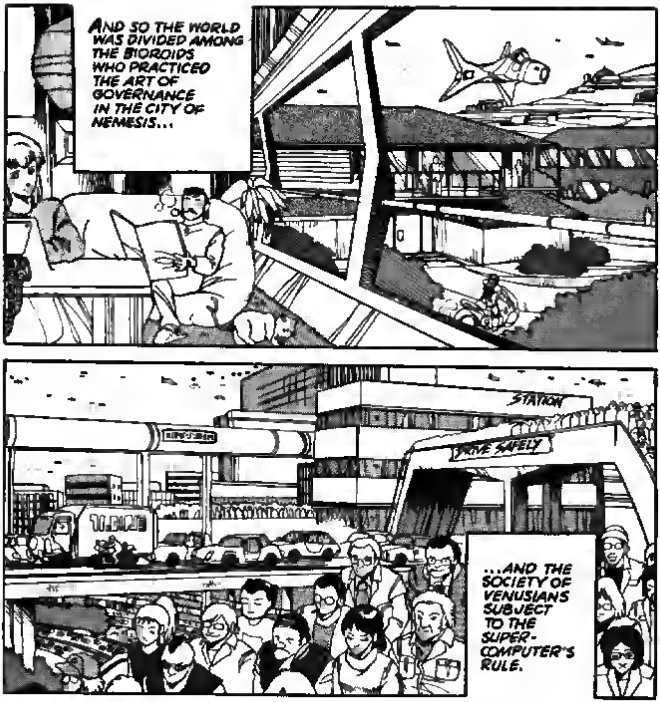
UPON COMPLETION OF NEMESIS, THE ENTIRE PLANET SURRENDERED ITSELF TO THE CONTROL OF THE ULTIMATE BENEVOLENT DICTATOR.

NEMESIS

BUT, NEMESIS NEEDED AGENTS TO DEFEND ITS COMPUTERIZED ADMINISTRATION AND EXECUTE ITS ORDERS. THE AGENTS WERE CALLED, SOMEWHAT OMINOUSLY, EXECUTORS.

THUS, EACH REGION WAS ASSIGNED ITS OWN EXECUTORS.. BIOROIDS GENERATED THROUGH GENETIC MANIPULATION, RECIPIENTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING FROM BIRTH.

AND NEMESIS BUILT A GREAT CITY WHERE THE EXECUTORS MIGHT LIVE.


AND SO THE WORLD WAS DIVIDED AMONG THE BIOROIDS WHO PRACTICED THE ART OF GOVERNANCE IN THE CITY OF NEMESIS...
STATION
DRIVE SAFELY
...AND THE SOCIETY OF VENUSIANS SUBJECT TO THE SUPER-COMPUTER'S RULE.

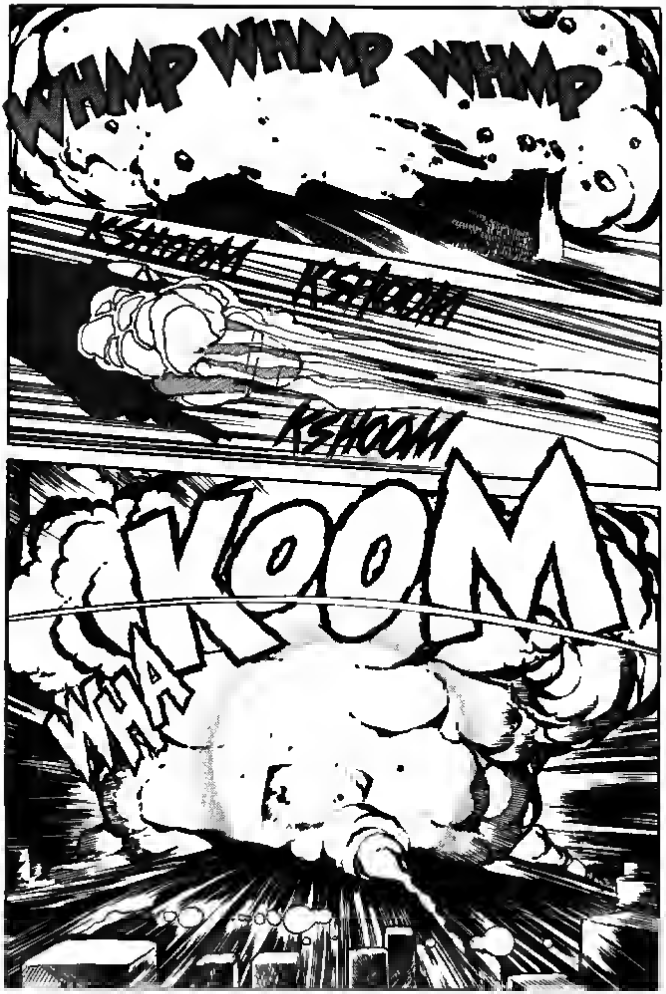
NEMESIS CREATED ANOTHER SELF-AWARE COMPUTER, **TANTALOS**, ENTRUSTING IT WITH THE TRAINING OF THE BIOROIDS, AND IT CONSTRUCTED ITS OWN MOBILE ROBOT TERMINAL, **URANUS**. IN TIME, CHRONOS--THE MOST SUCCESSFUL OF THE BIOROIDS BUILT BY THE PERFECTIONIST URANUS--TOOK OVER THE REINS OF POWER FROM NEMESIS, AND TRUE GOVERNMENT BEGAN. ABOUT THE TIME LEGAL RESTRICTIONS WERE TIGHTENED ON THE SIZE OF THE BIOROID POPULATION, **ZEUS** WAS CREATED AND DEFEATED CHRONOS IN A FIERCELY CONTESTED ELECTION. EVENTUALLY, THE GENERATION OF NEW BIOROIDS WAS PROHIBITED, BUT NEMESIS REMAINED WARY LEST THE GOVERNMENT BECOME TOO STRONG. IN GREATEST SECRECY, IT WORKED WITH TANTALOS TO CREATE **TYPHON**. ZEUS LEARNED OF TYPHON JUST AFTER HER BIRTH, AND DESTROYED HER IN A SAVAGE BATTLE IN THE ETONA MOUNTAINS. BUT NEMESIS ONCE AGAIN GENERATED THE TYPHON PROGRAM AND, CONCEALING HER FROM THE EYES OF ZEUS, RAISED HER IN THE WORLD OF MAN.

TEOTIHUACAN CITY.
...AND ME A MAGIC DEMON WARRIOR!
SAY WHAT?
I'M SAYING I CAN DO MIND SHOTS, TOO! WHY DON'T THEY JUST LET ME KILL HER FROM HERE?
HAW. HAW. HAW!
YOUR MIND SHOTS WOULDN'T EVEN FAZE HER.

LOOK, WE'RE ALL LICENCED A-CLASS FEDERAL POLICE! THIS WHOLE CHARADE'S A DAMN INSULT!
HAW!
IT'S THE TARGET'S FAULT. SHE'S JUST TOO DANGEROUS. IF WE SCREW UP AND SHE GETS AWAY, THEN YOU CAN USE YOUR MAGIC ALL YOU WANT.
IS SHE REALLY THAT TOUGH?
DREADNAUGHT CLASS. THE STRONGEST SORCERESS ON THE PLANET, I WAGER.
A RESERVE EXECUTOR..?!
SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE THE END OF THE LINE - THE LAST DIRECT DESCENDANT OF NEMESIS.
HEY, HEY.. NEMESIS WAS CREATED TO BUILD POLITICIANS, RIGHT?
AND THERE AIN'T NO END TO THOSE GUYS! HAW!
ENTERING COMBAT ZONE NOW!
I FIGURE NEMESIS IS CHECKING OUT OF THIS POLITICAL SYSTEM.
IS IT REALLY OKAY TO WASTE HER?
ORDERS ARE ORDERS.

Mmm.....
.....
Mmph.
ZZZZ
SHE'S SLEEPING, DAMN IT! I COULD TAKE HER OUT WITH ONE GOOD—
WHOT!
THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LAST GUY!
DON'T EVER TREAT HER LIKE A NORMAL!
EVEN ASLEEP?!
THAT ROOM'S WRAPPED IN SPELLS-- EVEN THE GARBAGE CAN WOULD FIGHT FOR HER!

Oh, WHAT THE HELL. IT'S ALL THE SAME...
..A COUPLE OF MICROWARP SHELLS WILL PUT HER OUT. ANY OBJECTIONS ?
Heh
FIRST ROUND LOADED. FIRE WHEN READY. FIRE WHEN READY
KSHOOM
KSHOOM
KSHOOM
zz
Mph
WHKOOM


WHMP WHMP WHMP
KSHOOM KSHOOM
KSHOOM
WHA KOOM

WHAT DO YOU THINK? MORE?
HOLD IT..

:Phew!:

SHIT! WE SCREWED IT! GET US OUT OF HERE!
SHAKE HER OFF! FULL POWER!
YOU! USE YOUR MAGIC TO GIVE US A SCREEN!
?!

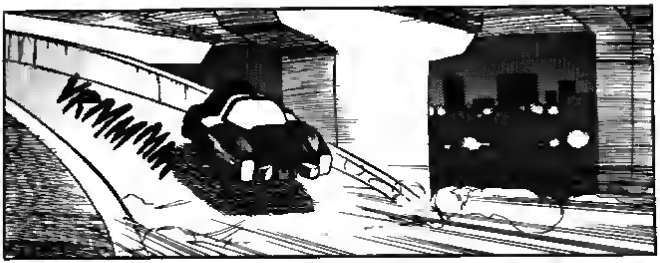
. . . . .
. . . . .
VEEE!
Mmph...
YAWN
HOLY... YOU MEAN WE REALLY DIDN'T FAZE HER?
IDIOT! STOP BABBLING AND HELP US GET AWAY!
ONCE WE'RE IN ORBIT, HEAD STRAIGHT FOR DARKSIDE.
HURRY!

KRASH
APA!
HGHH..
.....
WE'RE JUST... ZEUS... AAARGH!
HWWNG!
...?!

EEYAA!
BOMF
AUTO DESTRUCT ...?
A LOYAL SERVANT ...
AARG NO...!
I... Huh?
YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT. NOW.
LEAVE HER!
AGENTS OF ZEUS, THE CHIEF EXECUTOR..?
COLD OUT...
SO COLD...

WHMP
HNNG
OWWW...
THAT HURT, DAMMIT!
SO NOW WHAT? WE JUST GO BACK TO BASE?
WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?
I'D HEARD RUMORS, BUT...
.. SHE'S GOT A HELL OF A LOT MORE POWER THAN I FIGURED!
SHIT...
NOTHIN' WE CAN DO... JUST FILE A REPORT
HONK
HONK
HONK
SKREEE

!
GET OUT OF THE ROAD, YOU IDIOTS!
YOU WANT TO GET KILLED ?!
SHE DROPPED US ON A HIGHWAY?!
KUAK
VRMMMM
GYAAA!
OWW OWW OWWWW!
VRRMMMM


VRMMMMM

ZEUS' PRIVATE TROOPS. eh.. Hmmm.
I BETTER REPORT THIS TO NEMESIS.

WHA--?
...
...
INIMAL

WHY?ME? YOU SHUN UVVA BITCH!!
PLEASE, SIR! DON'T--
HEY, YOU!

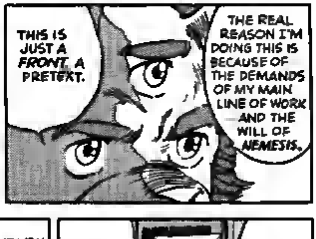
DADDY!
BOSS!
THEY TALK?

WHO IN'HELL'E THEY? YOU, YA--

WHOK

FWOO
BUT DADDY! HE WAS A CUSTOMER!
CUSTOMERS LIKE HIM, WE DON'T NEED. BESIDES, I'M CLOSING EARLY
BUT BUT BOSS—IT'S ONLY SEVEN O'CLOCK!
I'VE GOT SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS.
GET EVERYONE TO MY PLACE AND WAIT FOR ME THERE.
IT'S IMPORTANT, SO DO IT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE
ALL RIGHT, THEN.

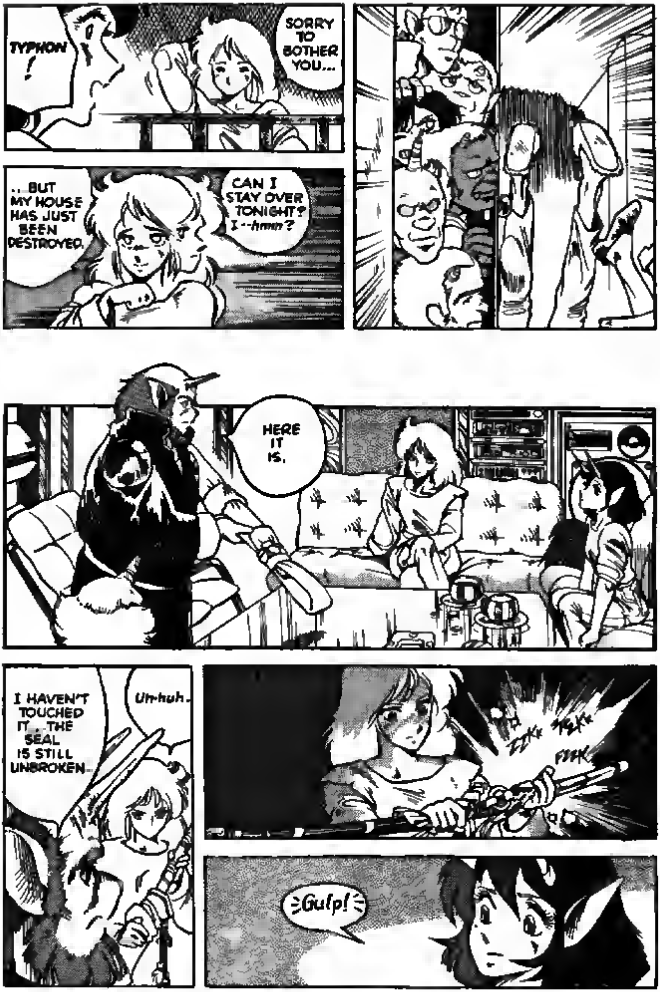
FORGET IT THE RESTAURANT *OWIMAL* SUFFERS FROM A SERIOUS SLUMP IN BUSINESS. IT WILL GO BANKRUPT, AND ITS EMPLOYEES WILL SCATTER TO THE FOUR WINDS.
WHAAAT?!


THIS IS JUST A *FRONT*. A PRETEXT.
THE REAL REASON I'M DOING THIS IS BECAUSE OF THE DEMANDS OF MY MAIN LINE OF WORK AND THE WILL OF *NEMESIS*.

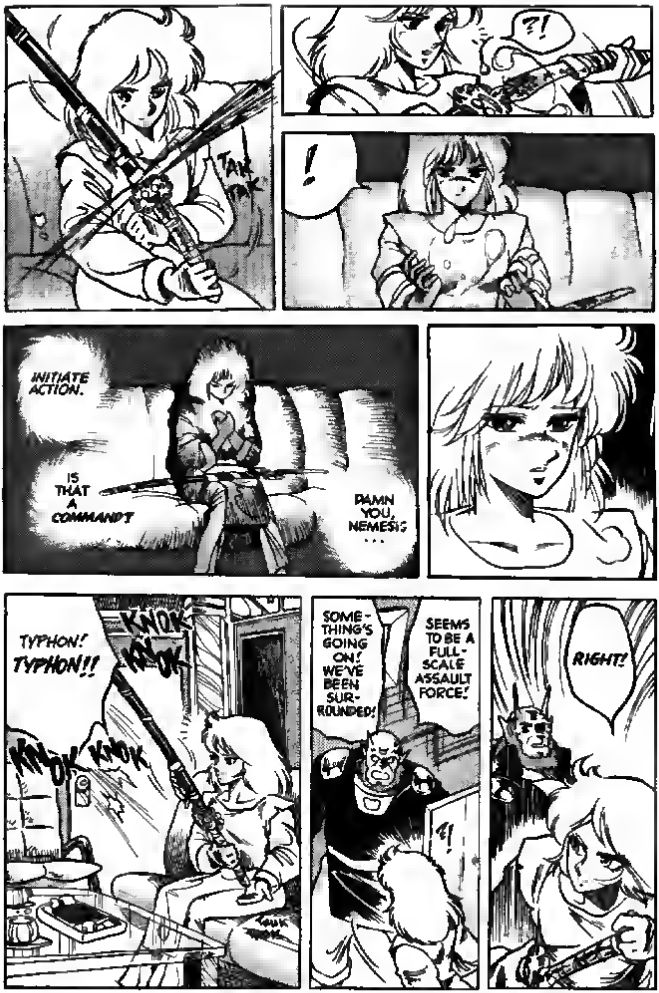
THAT GROUP OF NOMADS THAT PEDDLES STUFF THEY CLAIM IS *AMBROSIA** AND *NECTAR*+?
YES. WE WILL ALL JOIN THEM-- SEPARATELY OF COURSE-- AND RUN A BRANCH STORE.

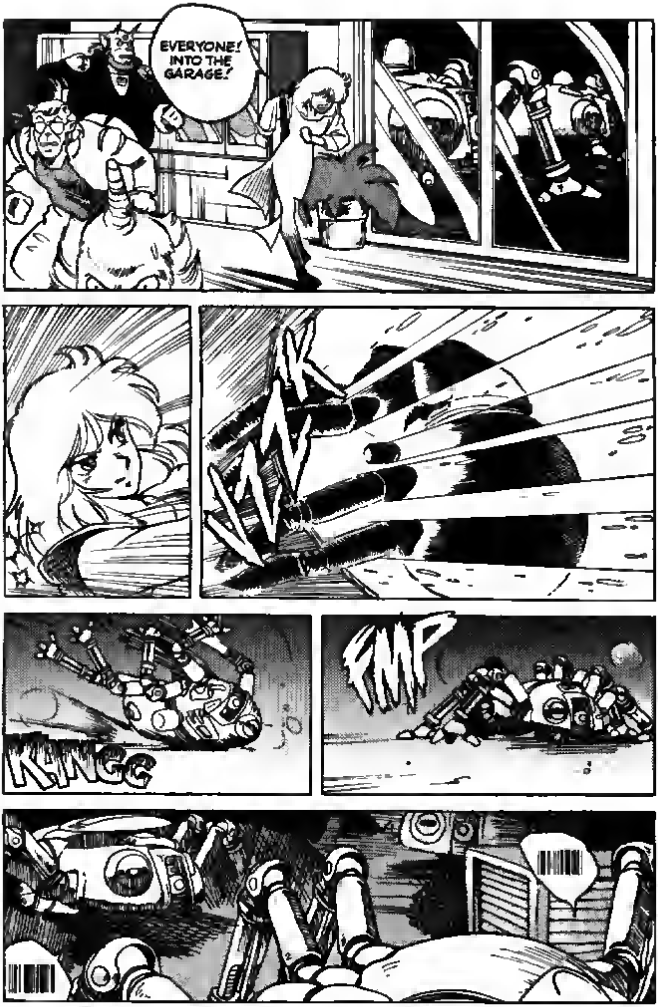
*FOOD BESTOWING IMMORTALITY
+THE WINE OF THE GODS

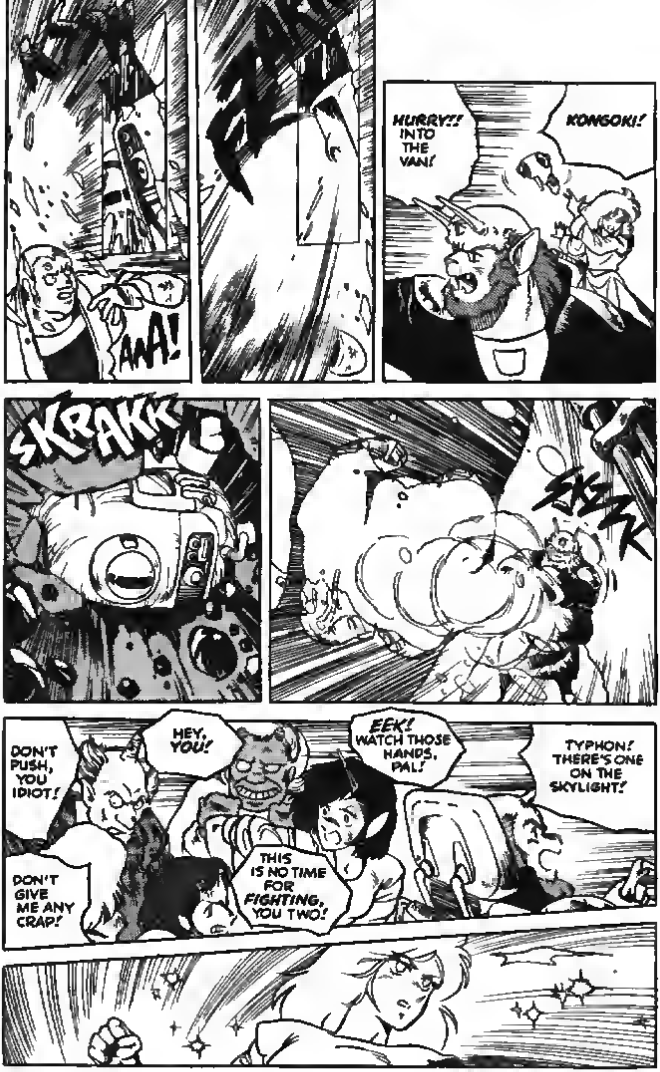
EVER HEAR OF DUNA TYPHON?
Y-YES... SHE'S THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF NEMESIS.
THEY SAY SHE'S A SORCERESS WHOSE POWER MATCHES FIVE DIVISIONS OF THE INTERPLANETARY FORCES, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT...
DOES THIS INVOLVE HER?
YES.
WHEN TYPHON WAS BORN, NEMESIS GAVE ME A SWORD FOR SAFEKEEPING.
I WAS TOLD TO HAND THE SWORD OVER TO HER TODAY AND LEAVE TEOTI-HUACAN.
HELLO? ANYONE HOME?
!
IS YASHA HOME? CAN I COME IN?

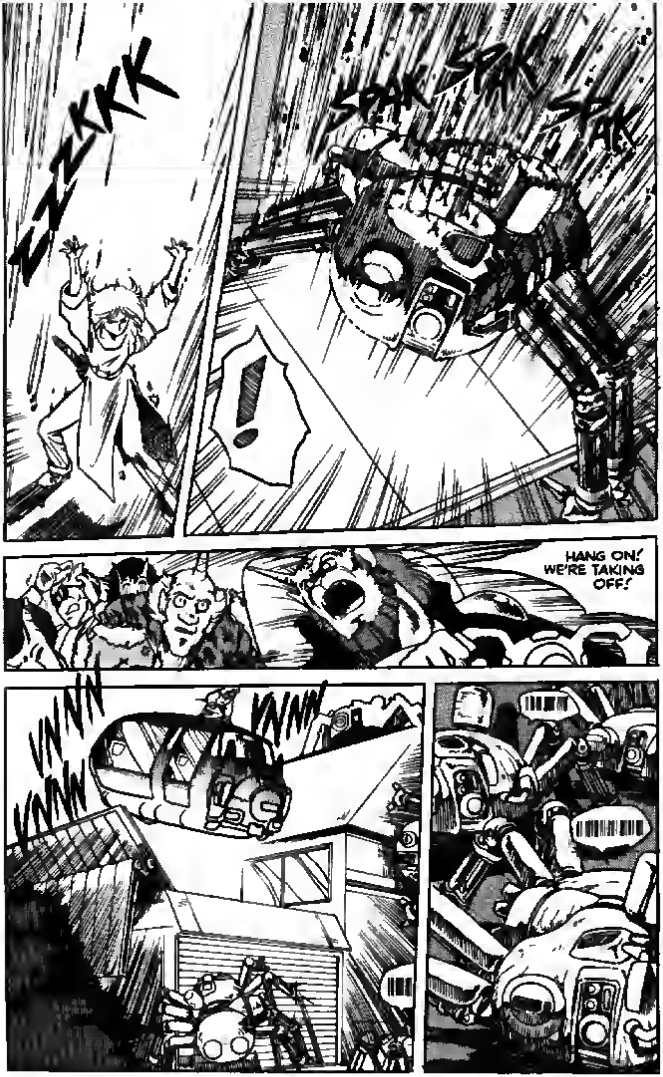

TYPHON!
SORRY TO BOTHER YOU...
..BUT MY HOUSE HAS JUST BEEN DESTROYED.
CAN I STAY OVER TONIGHT? I--hmm?
HERE IT IS.
I HAVEN'T TOUCHED IT.. THE SEAL IS STILL UNBROKEN.
Um-huh.
FISH
FISH
:Gulp!:

CHAK
WHAT TH-?!
ARE YOUR EYES ALL RIGHT?
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
NO... BUT THERE'S SOMETHING INSIDE THE HILT.
EXCUSE ME, BUT COULD EVERYONE LEAVE THE ROOM, PLEASE?
MY APOLOGIES.
THANKS.

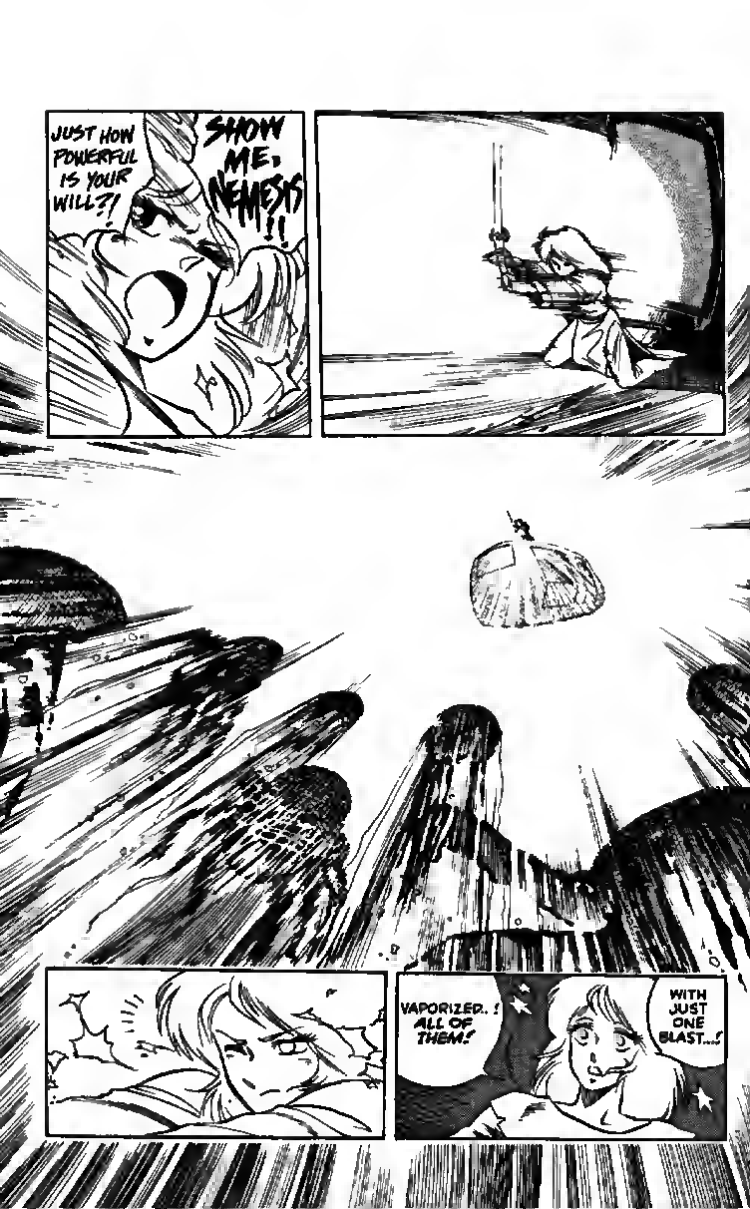

TAK
TAK
?!
!
INITIATE ACTION.
IS THAT A COMMAND?
DAMN YOU, NEMESIS...
TYPHON! TYPHON!!
KNOK
KNOK
KNOK
KNOK
KNOK
SOMETHING'S GOING ON! WE'VE BEEN SURROUNDED!
SEEMS TO BE A FULL-SCALE ASSAULT FORCE!
4!
RIGHT!


EVERYONE! INTO THE GARAGE!
KLANG
FMP


AAA!
HURRY!! INTO THE VAN!
KONGOKI!
SKRAKK
SKZZK
DON'T PUSH, YOU IDIOT!
HEY, YOU!
EEK! WATCH THOSE HANDS, PAL!
TYPHON! THERE'S ONE ON THE SKYLIGHT!
DON'T GIVE ME ANY CRAP!
THIS IS NO TIME FOR FIGHTING, YOU TWO!


ZZZKKK
SPAK SPAK SPAK
!
HANG ON! WE'RE TAKING OFF!
VVNN
VVNN
VVNNN

KSHANG
KSHANG


JUST HOW POWERFUL IS YOUR WILL?!
SHOW ME, NEMESIS!!
VAPORIZED..! ALL OF THEM!
WITH JUST ONE BLAST...!

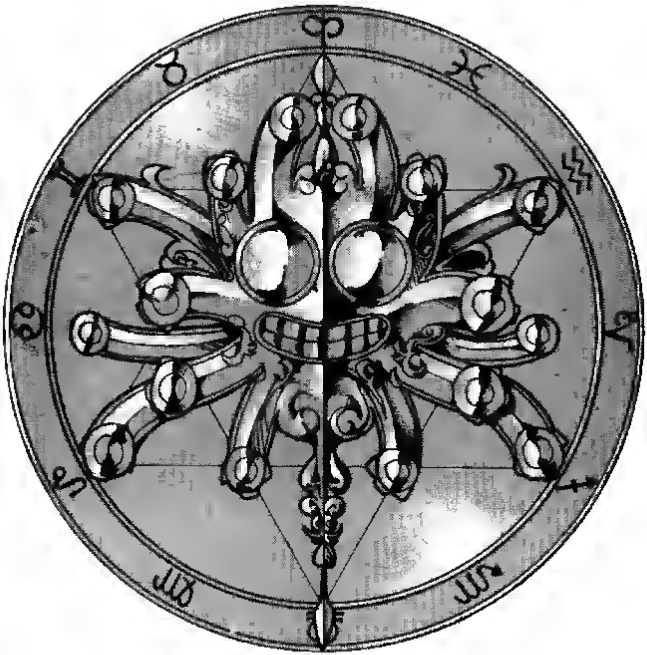
OH, YEAH?! WELL, I'M STILL THE CHIEF!
SO? WHO CARES?!
WHO CUT THE CHEESE?!
GACK!
KONGOKI ...
I KNOW... I KNOW! WE'LL HEAD STRAIGHT FOR THE CARAVAN.
I CAN BUILD ANOTHER HOUSE LATER. RIGHT NOW...
...WE'RE JUST LUCKY TO BE ALIVE.
I'M SORRY...
FORGET IT. IT'S WHAT NEMESIS WANTED.
THAT'S A MIGHTY POWERFUL TALISMAN* WHY DID NEMESIS GIVE IT TO YOU?
I THINK IT'S HIS WAY OF... COMPLAINING TO ME...
I GUESS.
THE HUMAN RACE IS LIKE AN EGG THAT HAS BUILT ITS OWN SHELL OF SCIENCE AND CULTURE. NEMESIS IS ITS GUARDIAN.
BUT NOW THE EGG HAS GROWN INTO A LIVE CHICK AND IS PECKING AT ITS SHELL FROM WITHIN. NEMESIS MUST PROTECT BOTH CHICK AND SHELL
AND I THINK IT'S STARTING TO MAKE HIM NEUROTIC.

*AN OBJECT INVESTED WITH GREAT POWER, WHICH IT WILL VENT ONLY FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE. WITHOUT A TALISMAN, A SORCERER CAN DRAW ONLY ON HIS PERSONAL POWER.

THE RULERS AND THE RULED SUFFER FROM THE GAP BETWEEN IDEALS AND REALITY.
NEMESIS POSSESSES THE SUM TOTAL OF ALL HUMAN WISDOM, YET ULTIMATELY HE IS JUST A MACHINE.
HE CANNOT TRANSCEND HIS ROLE AS NOTHING MORE THAN A TOOL.
THE SAME GOES FOR ZEUS, THE PRESENT CHIEF EXECUTOR BUT ZEUS HAS EMOTIONS.
AND RECENTLY HE SEEMS TO HAVE DEVELOPED A DISTASTE FOR HUMAN EXISTENCE.
HE HAS BECOME DANGEROUS
THIS SWORD IS IN PERFECT PHASE WITH MY OWN POWER.
AND IT SEEMS THE TIME HAS COME WHEN MY POWER WILL BE NEEDED.
A TALISMAN THAT MANIFESTS THE GREATEST POWER IN THE WORLD, eh... SO THAT'S WHY ZEUS PANICKED AND LAUNCHED AN ATTACK.
WELL, I DIDN'T REALLY EXPECT MY LIFE TO STAY PEACEFUL FOREVER...
HEY, TYPHON... WHAT WERE THOSE SPIDER THINGS BACK THERE?
EEK!
DON'T SNEAK UP ON ME LIKE THAT!
THOSE WERE SERVOBOTS, REMOTE-CONTROLLED MACHINES. THE LATEST THING OUT OF THE CYBERNETICS LABS.
I THINK YOU'LL BE SEEING A LOT MORE OF THEM.

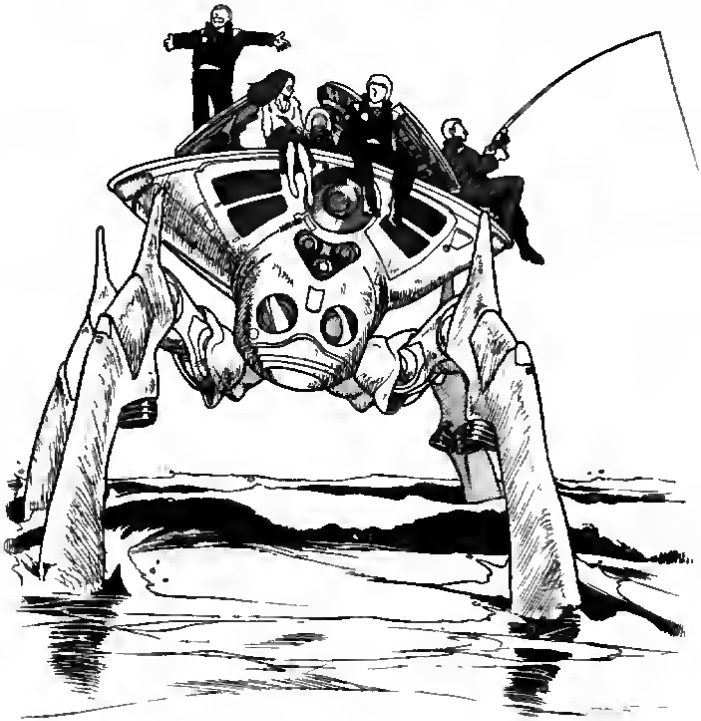
SHOWS HOW SCARED OF YOU ZEUS IS...
?!?
THAT'S A GOOD ATTITUDE FOR HIM TO HAVE. HE SHOULD BE EVEN MORE SCARED THAN HE IS!
ACTUALLY, YASHA .. I BET YOU COULD USE ONE.
A SERVBOT, I MEAN.
YUCK! FORGET IT! THEY LOOK TOO MUCH LIKE SPIDERS!
WHAT IF YOU HAD ONE SHAPED LIKE A HUMAN ...?
Huh?
YOU MEAN THEY HAVE DIFFERENT MODELS?
OCTOPUS MODEL... CAT MODEL ..
HOTDOG MODEL..?
SOUNDS DELI-CIOUS!
THAT REMINDS ME... I'M HUNGRY, DADDY!
YEAH... BE NICE TO HAVE A TASTY-LOOKING SERVOBOT! IF YOU GET MY MEANING..
OH, YEAH! GIMME A SWEET YOUNG THING MODEL!
PERFECT HOUSEWIFE MODEL!
A PLAY-MATE MODEL!
LINGERIE AND FISHNET STOCKINGS MODEL!
BEEF-CAKE MODEL FOR ME!

END: BLACK MAGIC PROLOGUE



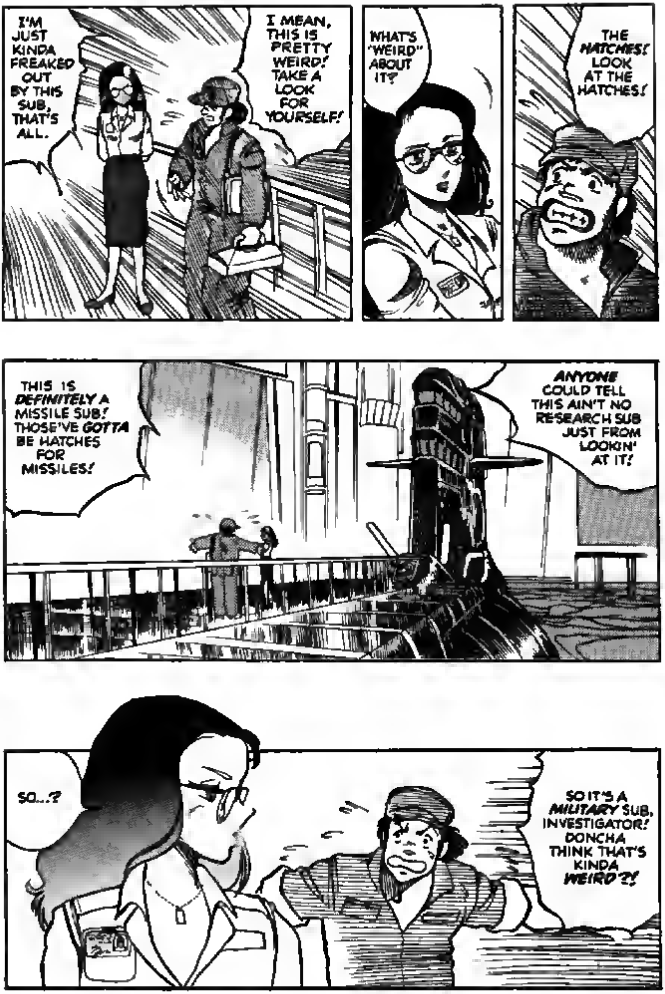
Black Magic Chapter One:

BOWMAN



CENTRAL CAMP: VENUSIAN PROJECT FOR TERRAFORMING THE THIRD PLANET
JEEZ, IT'S HUGE!
I'M SUPPOSTA MAINTAIN THIS ALL BY MYSELF?!
YEAH, IT'S BIG, ALL RIGHT. THEY MUST'VE ASSEMBLED IT AT A SPACE STATION AND BROUGHT IT DOWN BY SHUTTLE.
WONDER WHY THEY DIDN'T JUST BUILD IT HERE?
NOW TH'HELL SHOULD I KNOW?
WELL, THERE MUST BE SOME REASON ANYWAY, SEE THAT YOU DO A GOOD JOB ON IT.
I HEARD THEY'RE GONNA USE THIS AS AN OCEAN FLOOR SURVEY SHP SO WHY'D THEY NEED SOMETHIN' THE SIZE OF A GODDAMN NAVY BATTLESUB, huh?!
THEY THINK WE'RE DUMB OR SOMETHIN'?!
NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT, ANYWAY.
HEY, YOU WANT ME TO TELL THE TOP BRASS HOW MUCH YOU'RE COMPLAINING ...?
WH-WHOA! NO WAY!

MAN, THAT'S NOT EVEN FUNNY.
I DUNNO ABOUT THAT SLIMY BASTARD
JERK...
HUH?!
HEY! WAIT!
GONE ALREADY... SHIT!
HE MUSTA SMELLED WORK OR SOMETHIN' ...
IS ANYTHING WRONG.?
GACK!
J-JEEZ! CHIEF INVESTIGATOR PANDORA! DON'T SCARE ME LIKE THAT!
HEY..

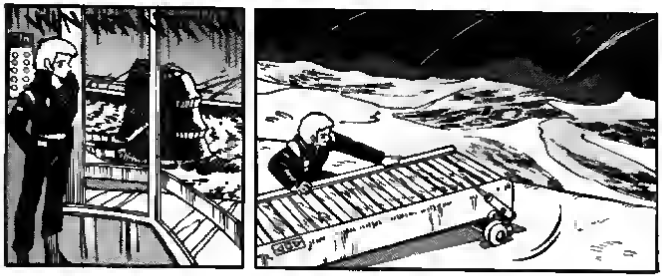

I'M JUST KINDA FREAKED OUT BY THIS SUB, THAT'S ALL.
I MEAN, THIS IS PRETTY WEIRD! TAKE A LOOK FOR YOURSELF!
WHAT'S "WEIRD" ABOUT IT?
THE HATCHES! LOOK AT THE HATCHES!
THIS IS DEFINITELY A MISSILE SUB! THOSE'VE GOTTA BE HATCHES FOR MISSILES!
ANYONE COULD TELL THIS AIN'T NO RESEARCH SUB JUST FROM LOOKIN' AT IT!
SO...?
SO IT'S A MILITARY SUB, INVESTIGATOR! DONCHA THINK THAT'S KINDA WEIRD?!

WELL, IT'S A SHAME, AT ANY RATE.
Huh?! I...
WAIT A SEC! THIS...
THIS AIN'T NO SURPRISE FOR YOU!
EXACTLY. SORRY ABOUT THAT.
KCHAK
N-NO! WAIT!! YOU CAN'T JUST KILL ME!
THEY'LL CATCH YOU! THEY'LL DO ONE'A THOSE BRAINBURNS ON YA!
NO NO NO! NOOOO!!
BLAM
HRNG!!
AAAAAAAA
MY! HOW ACCOMODATING OF HIM!
SUCH A TIDY FELLOW!
I GUESS YOU REALLY CAN TELL AT A GLANCE...
THAT IS A SHAME.

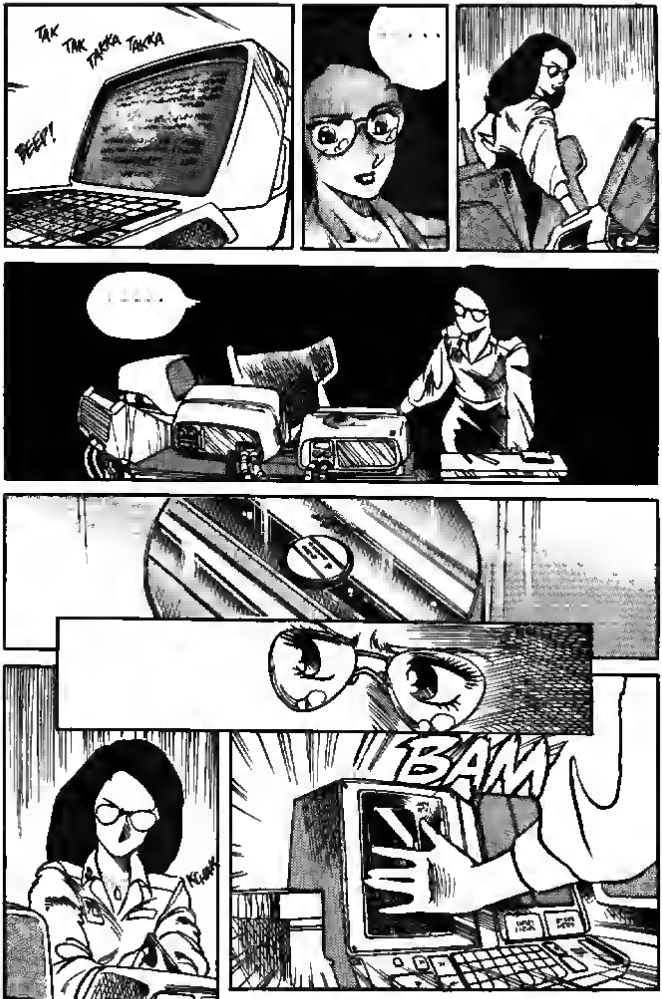
CENTRAL CAMP ASSEMBLY HALL
AT LAST, MY FRIENDS!
ZZZ
ZZZ
AT LONG LAST, WE ARE READY TO PUT THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON THE PROMETHEUS PROJECT THAT BEGAN, YEARS AGO, WITH THE ARTIFICIAL SUN! THE LONG-HELD DREAM OF THE VENUSIAN PEOPLE...
...IS ABOUT TO COME TRUE!
ZZZ
THIS PLANET WILL SOON...
BE INHABITABLE BY HUMAN BEINGS!
AS A RESULT...
WE WILL NOT BE SHORT OF LAND OR RESOURCES FOR SOME TIME TO COME!
TO BE BLUNT, THIS LENGTHY PROJECT IS FINALLY ON THE VERGE OF COMPLETION! NO LONGER MUST WE DEVASTATE OUR MOTHER PLANET VENUS FOR THE SAKE OF THE COLONIES!
GNX
WHEN WE-THE INITIAL TERRAFORMING GROUP--PULL OUT, THE FIRST PHASE CONSTRUCTION GROUP WILL ARRIVE!
AS EACH TEAM COMPLETES ITS WORK, IT WILL RETURN TO THE SPACE STATION AND AWAIT A FLIGHT OUT.
LET US NOW RECOUNT THE EARLY DAYS...

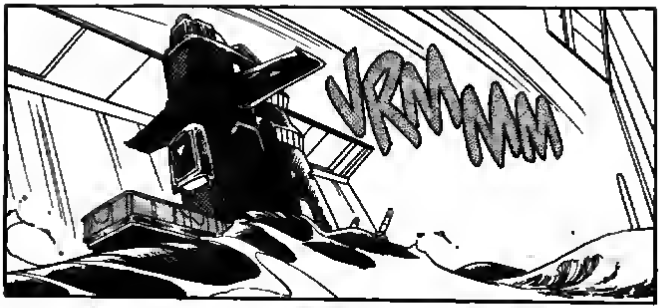
AAAHH... WHAT A RELIEF! MY BRAINS WERE GOING NUMB.
MY SHOULDERS ARE STIFF...
"HARRUMPH! THIS LENGTHY SPEECH IS FINALLY ON THE VERGE OF blah blah blah--!"
HAW, HAW! PRETTY GOOD!
YEAH, NOT BAD SO HOW COME WE INVESTIGATORS HAVE TO LISTEN TO THESE SPEECHES?
HEY, EREBUS! YOU WANNA HEAD OVER TO THE BAR?
Er.. WELL...
ACTUALLY I FIGURED I'D HEAD OVER TO VISIT PANDORA... SORRY!
MY, MY! AREN'T WE DEVOTED! GOOD LUCK!
I THINK SHE'S DOWN AT THE DOCK WHERE THAT SUB ARRIVED TODAY!
GOTCHA! THANKS!
WANNA GO TAKE A LOOK?
.....
OF COURSE!

.....
.....
Hmmm... MAYBE SHE'S ONBOARD ...

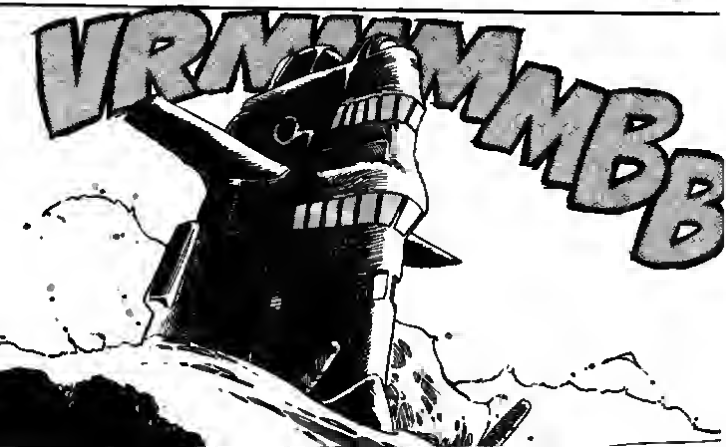


MMMMMMMM
KANG
...?
TAKKA TAK
TAKKA TAKKA BEEP!


TAK
TAK
TAKKA
TAKKA
BEEP!
. . . .
. . . . . .
BAM
KLUNK


VRMMMM

Huh?
WHAT THE HELL'? IT'S MOVING OUT!
THAT'S CRAZY!! WE'RE THE CREW!
SO WHAT'S GOING ON'?
.....


VRMMMMBBB

!
WHOOPS!
KLANK
COME ON!!
Huh? WHERE?!
WHAT DO YOU THINK?! I'M GOING AFTER IT!!!
IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE FOR THE EPIMETHEUS TO LEAVE WITHOUT US!
I MEAN, IT'S OUR SHIP!

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON, ANYWAY?
SOMEBODY'S TAKEN CONTROL OF THE SUB!
YEAH, BUT WHY?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT I INTEND TO FIND OUT!
LET'S GO!
EREBUS IS INSIDE... IF WE CAN REACH HIM, WE'LL BE ABLE TO FIND OUT WHAT'S UP
CALL THE GENERAL DIRECTOR!
--AND THEREFORE, WE CAN EXPECT..
EH? SOMEONE'S BEEN SHOT?
WHA-- WHAT DID YOU SAY?!

TAKKA TAK TAKKA TAKKA
?
KAHOOM
FWOOSH
GENERAL COMMAND! THIS IS THE LELA-1! DO YOU READ ME?
THEY'VE LAUNCHED A MISSILE!
I'LL INTER-CEPT THEM!
WAIT!

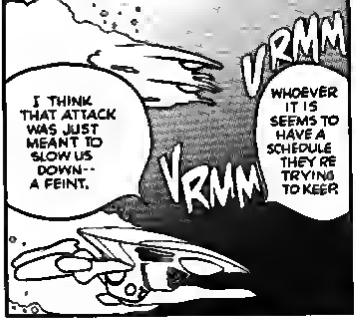
RMB
RMB
RMB
RMB
THEY'VE ACTIVATED THE DEFENSE FIELD!
VRMM
WE CAN'T ATTACK OR COMMUNICATE WITH THEM! RETREAT AT FULL SPEED!
EXECUTE LRF4!
LELA 2! COME IN, LELA 2!
HURRY!
PANG
VRMMMMMM
VRMMMMM

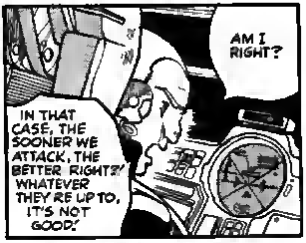
THE EPIMETHEUS IS A MISSILE SUBMARINE ?!
PANDORA WAS RESPONSIBLE!! I HAD NO--
I FIGURED IT OUT! SO SHE SHOT ME!!
A SCHEME BY THE OPPOSITION ...?
SIR! THE EPIMETHEUS AND THREE LELA-CLASS VESSELS HAVE LEFT PORT WITHOUT CLEARANCE!
WHAT-?!
BAM

Ohwww.. WHAT THE HELL?
WE COULDN'T HAVE LEFT PORT...
A...A MISSILE SUB?!
BEEP
SPZK!

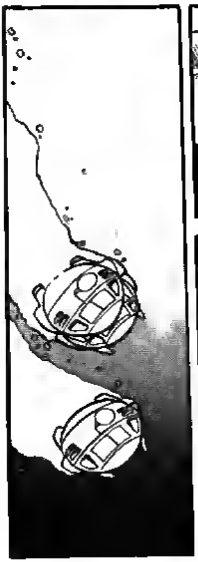
A SECURITY LASER AFTER ME, eh?
KSSHHH
EXCEPT THE FIRE-FIGHTING NOZZLES TOOK IT OUT..
WHICH MEANS THE SHIP'S COMPUTER ISN'T OPERATING IT!
SOMEONE IS ACCESSING SECURITY SYSTEMS MANUALLY?
THE ENGINE IS DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO THE MAIN COMPUTER...SO ONLY SOMEONE ON THE BRIDGE WOULD BE ABLE TO INTERVENE!
BUT I STILL DON'T GET IT-- WHO ON THIS PLANET WOULD WANT A MISSILE SUB?!
KREEK
HHHNNK!
DON'T MOVE!
Uh-oh ..
WHAT?!
WHO?!

EREBUS ?!
PANDORA ?!
...?!
DON'T TELL ME YOU GOT CAUGHT UP IN THIS, TOO?'
GUESS WE BOTH LUCKED OUT, huh? HAH HA.
WELL, N-NO...
I... er...
KCHINK!
THE SUB IS SLOWING DOWN!
MAYBE THEY WANT TO SURRENDER.
BELOW COMBAT SPEED?! YOU THINK THEY'LL STOP?


VRMM
VRMM
I THINK THAT ATTACK WAS JUST MEANT TO SLOW US DOWN-- A FEINT.
WHOEVER IT IS SEEMS TO HAVE A SCHEDULE THEY'RE TRYING TO KEEP.


AM I RIGHT?
IN THAT CASE, THE SOONER WE ATTACK, THE BETTER RIGHT?! WHATEVER THEY'RE UP TO, IT'S NOT GOOD!

PROBABLY. ANYWAY, THESE ISLA-CLASS SUBMERSIBLES CAN OUTDIVE ANY MISSILE SUB.
LET'S GIVE THAT TRUCK DRIVER SOMETHING TO WORRY ABOUT--
WE'LL ATTACK FROM BELOW!



BEEP BEEP

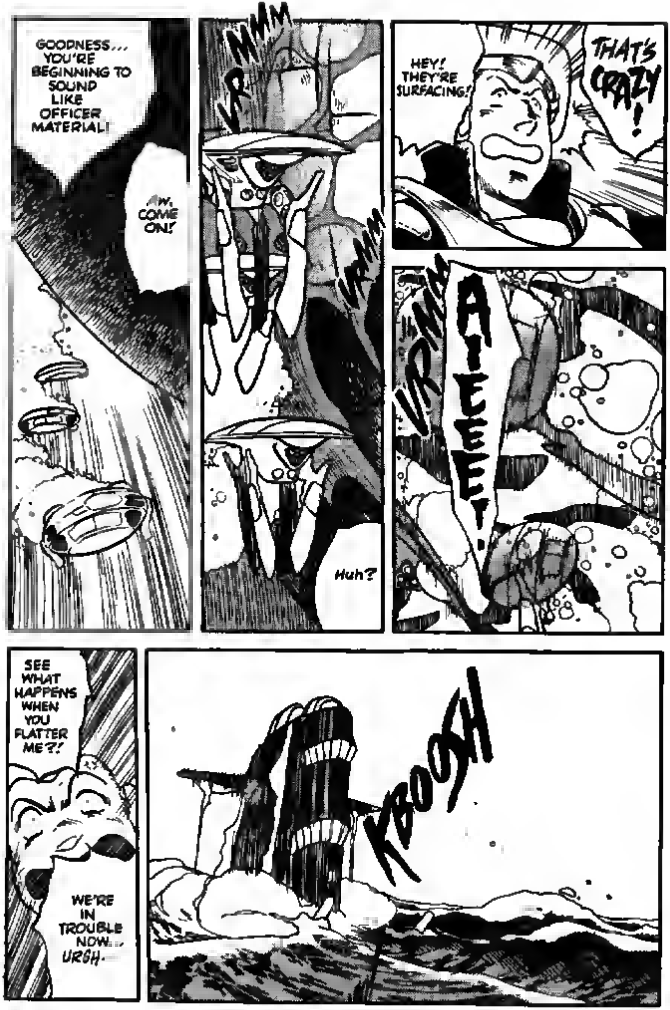
BEEP BEEP
?!

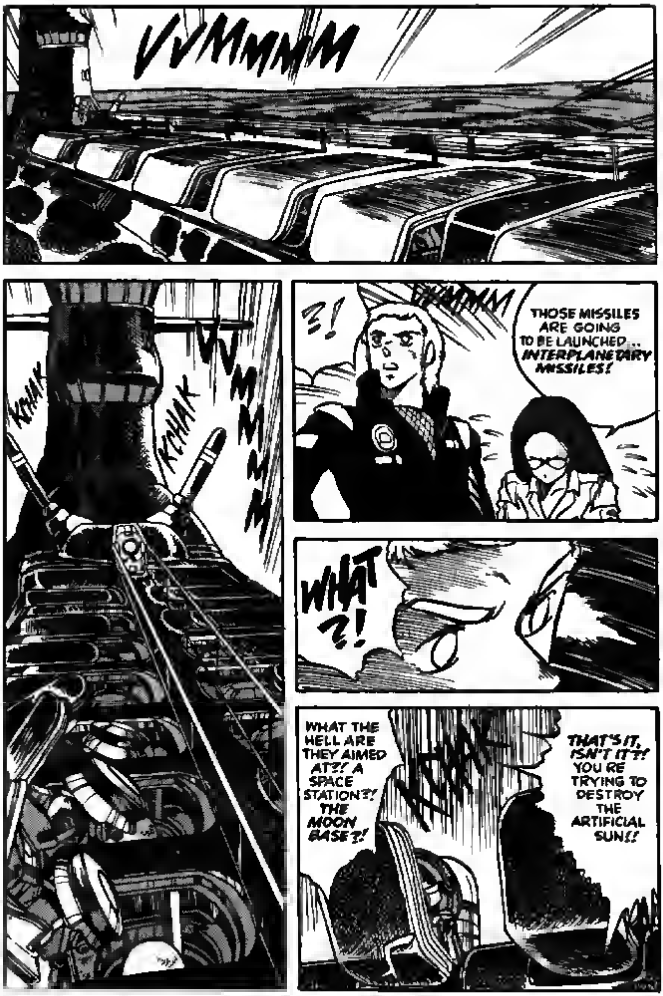
OUT OF MY WAY!
WHDD
HNGF!
BEEP
PANDORA!
YOU...
.....
.....
.....

"RETURN FIRE MANUALLY," IT SAYS! WHY DIDN'T IT ALREADY SINK THEM?!
TAKKA TAK
TORPEDOES... LET'S SEE...
TAKKA TAKKA
OPERATION COMPLETE
Hmm?
TAKKA TAK TAKKA
TAKKA
NO TORPEDOES LOADED. COMPUTER ACCESS LOCKED. THANK YOU AND GOOD LUCK.
NO... .....
KSHHH
PANDORA !
PANDORA?!
Ohhh... I...
TRICKED! I'VE BEEN SUCH A FOOL!!
BAM
THAT... THAT BASTARD !!
?

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, PANDORA?!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? WHO TRICKED YOU? ANSWER ME!!
NO.. I.. .....
PANDORA!!
PLEASE..
PLEASE TELL ME
VRMMM

I HAVEN'T DETECTED ANY LAUNCH TRANSIENTS-- HOW COME?
SYAAAH!
IF YOU'RE CONSCIOUS AGAIN, YOU CAN START DRIVING YOUR OWN SUB!
I'M GONNA CHARGE YOU FOR THE FUEL!
OH, HOW PERFECTLY THOUGHTLESS OF ME!
YOU GOT ANY SONOBUOYS LOADED IN YOUR TUBES?
DIVE UNDER THE SUB AND FIRE IT OFF-- LET'S SEE IF WE CAN GET A REACTION OUT OF THEM.
GOT YOU!
BEEP
KVVAOOSHH
KANG
THAT SHOULD DO IT--WE'LL MOVE UP ALONGSIDE AND HOOK OUR MANIPULATORS ONTO THE DECK RAILING!
LET'S GO!


GOODNESS... YOU'RE BEGINNING TO SOUND LIKE OFFICER MATERIAL!
AW, COME ON!
VRMM
VRMM
VRMM
Huh?
HEY! THEY'RE SURFACING!
THAT'S CRAZY!
AIEEE!
SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FLATTER ME?!
WE'RE IN TROUBLE NOW... URSH.
KBOOSH

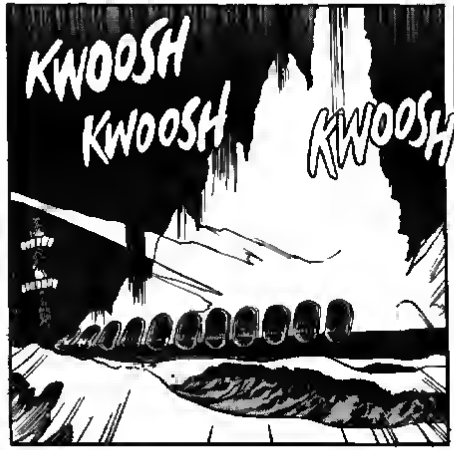

VVMMMM
KRHAK
KRHAK
VVMMMM
THOSE MISSILES ARE GOING TO BE LAUNCHED... INTERPLANETARY MISSILES!
WHAT?!
WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY AIMED AT?! A SPACE STATION?! THE MOON BASE?!
THAT'S IT, ISN'T IT?! YOU'RE TRYING TO DESTROY THE ARTIFICIAL SUN!!

YOU MUST BE CRAZY!! WHY DO YOU WANT TO DO THAT?!
I'M NOT THE CRAZY ONE!!
YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THIS PLANET WOULD BE VALUABLE TO US?!
BUT JUST LOOK AT WHAT THE MEDDLING OF THE VENUSIANS HAS DONE TO IT!
IF AN ENVIRONMENT PERMITS ONE LIFEFORM TO SURVIVE, IT'S GOING TO NOURISH OTHER KINDS OF LIFE, TOO--THAT'S INEVITABLE! AND DESPITE OUR ATTEMPTS TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS, ALREADY SEVERAL MILLION SPECIES OF LIFE HAVE EVOLVED HERE WITH DNA STRUCTURES UNIQUE TO THIS PLANET!!
YES, MAYBE... BUT--
LIKE THOSE GIANT REPTILES YOU GUYS HUNT DOWN WITH YOUR SUBS!
A YEAR ON THIS PLANET ISN'T LIKE A YEAR ON VENUS-- IT'S THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY FIVE DAYS LONG! TEMPERATURE-ADAPTIVE CHANGES ARE INCREDIBLY RAPID!
THE MOST RECENT SMALL LAND ANIMALS CAN MAINTAIN THEIR BODY TEMPERATURE ON THEIR OWN! DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING?!
THEY'RE MAMMALS, JUST LIKE US!

IF A LIFEFORM EMERGES THAT CAN RETAIN DNA INFORMATION MORE RELIABLY AND IN GREATER QUANTITY THAN WE VENUSIANS DO...
...WE WILL DIE OFF, NO MATTER HOW MUCH LAND RESOURCES WE HAVE AT OUR DISPOSAL!

SO YOU'RE DESTROYING THE ARTIFICIAL SUN...

BUT...
BUT I'M JUST A PAWN TO BE SACRIFICED...

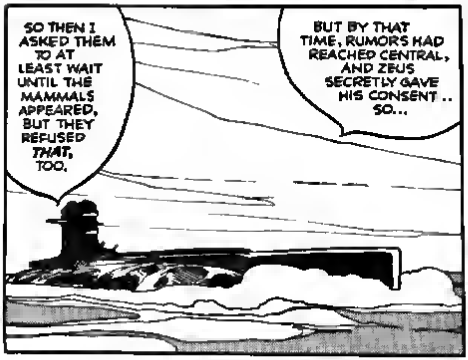

KWOOSH
KWOOSH
KWOOSH

POF
POF
POF

DID THE SECOND STAGE ROCKETS FIRE ?
≫sniff≪
LET ME SEE...
.....
YEP, EVERY ONE OF THEM.

EREBUS..
YES ..?

ACTUALLY, I REQUESTED SEVERAL TIMES THAT THE TERRAFORMING PROJECT BE HALTED..
...BUT THEY SAID MY ARGUMENTS WEREN'T CONVINCING, AND THE RISK WAS MINIMAL...

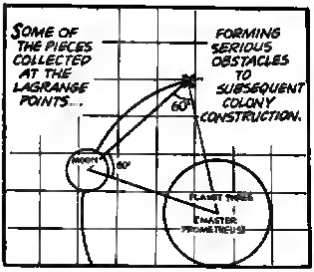

SO THEN I ASKED THEM TO AT LEAST WAIT UNTIL THE MAMMALS APPEARED, BUT THEY REFUSED THAT, TOO.
BUT BY THAT TIME, RUMORS HAD REACHED CENTRAL, AND ZEUS SECRETLY GAVE HIS CONSENT .. SO...

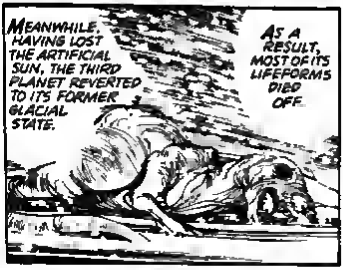
BUT WHY GO TO SUCH LENGTHS TO KEEP IT SECRET?

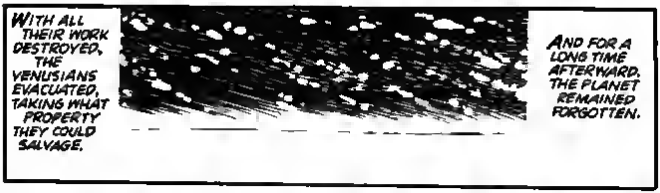
IF HE ORDERED IT STOPPED IN HIS OWN NAME, IT WOULD AFFECT HIS POLITICAL STANDING, I SUPPOSE...
YEAH... POLITICIANS ARE A SELFISH BUNCH.
NOW I GET IT...
SO THAT'S WHY THEY USED A MISSILE SUB··THEY'RE HARD TO DETECT, AND DON'T REQUIRE A LARGE SUPPORT BASE..
I..I WONDER WHAT WILL BECOME OF ME..?
WE'LL, YOU'VE DONE A PRETTY SEVERE THING.. NO DOUBT THERE WILL BE RETRIBUTION IN KIND.
I GUESS SO...
WE'RE IN AN AGE NOW WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY SPACE COLONIES AND LABS THAT THEY OBSTRUCT NAVIGATION.
I GUESS ONLY INTERSTELLAR SPACE REMAINS FOR THE VENUSIANS..
IT'LL NEVER WORK.
Huh?

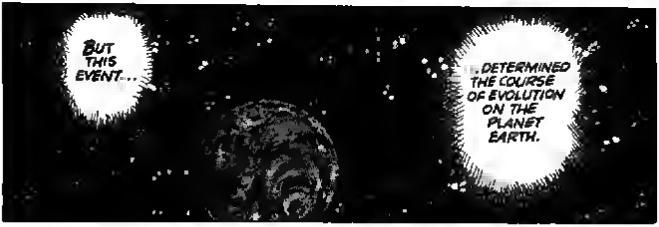
WE'VE REACHED OUR LIMIT AS A SPECIES...
HE.Ty 67.8x
LIFEFORMS WITH A DNA STRUCTURE BETTER THAN OURS, huh...
AND THEY MAY OUTNUMBER US ALREADY.
I SHOULDN'T HAVE YELLED AT YOU EARLIER.
SORRY ABOUT THAT.
EREBUS..
THANK YOU...

THE MISSILE TRAJECTORIES WERE FLAWLESS. THE ARTIFICIAL SUN ON THE LUNAR SURFACE WAS DESTROYED, AND A CHUNK OF BEDROCK FIVE HUNDRED MILES IN DIAMETER WAS BLOWN BEYOND THE ORBIT OF MARS.
THE EXPLOSION PULVERIZED APPROXIMATELY SIX PERCENT OF THE MOON'S MASS, AND HALTED ITS ROTATION.




MEANWHILE, HAVING LOST THE ARTIFICIAL SUN, THE THIRD PLANET REVERTED TO ITS FORMER GLACIAL STATE.
AS A RESULT, MOST OF ITS LIFEFORMS DIED OFF.


WITH ALL THEIR WORK DESTROYED, THE VENUSIANS EVACUATED, TAKING WHAT PROPERTY THEY COULD SALVAGE.
AND FOR A LONG TIME AFTERWARD, THE PLANET REMAINED FORGOTTEN.



END · BLACK MAGIC CHAPTER ONE: "BOWMAN"

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and